



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Dalrymple Proclaims *Birth Defects Prevention Month* in North Dakota

Bismarck, N.D. – Governor Jack Dalrymple has proclaimed January 2013 as *Birth Defects Prevention Month* in North Dakota. The North Dakota Department of Health is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPM) to inform women about ways to prevent birth defects, the leading cause of infant deaths in the United States.

“Every 4½ minutes, a baby is born in the United States with a birth defect,” said Devaiah Muccatira with the Department of Health’s Division of Children’s Special Health Services. “We want to raise awareness among health-care professionals and the public about the frequency with which birth defects occur in the United States and the steps that can be taken to prevent them. The risk for many types of birth defects can be reduced through healthy lifestyle choices and medical interventions before and during pregnancy.”

There are many different kinds of birth defects including congenital heart defects, cleft lip or palate, defects of brain and spine, and a variety of genetic syndromes such as Down syndrome. Some have only a minor and brief effect on a baby’s health, and some have life-threatening and/or life-long effects.

More than 120,000 babies born with a birth defect (approximately 1 in 33 live births) are reported each year in the United States. Birth defects are the most common cause of death in infants and the second most common cause of death in children ages one to four. In North Dakota, about one in six infant deaths are the result of birth defects. Public awareness, expert medical care, accurate and early diagnosis, and social support systems are all essential for optimal prevention and treatment of these all-too-common and often deadly conditions.

“Most people are unaware of how common, costly and critical birth defects are in the United States, or that there are simple steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of birth defects.” said Muccatira. “The health of both parents prior to pregnancy can affect the risk of having a child with a birth defect. Diet, lifestyle choices, factors in the environment, health conditions and

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medications before and during pregnancy all can play a role in preventing or increasing the risk of birth defects.”

Studies have demonstrated several important steps women can take to help prevent birth defects. Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant are advised to:

- Take 400 micrograms of folic acid *daily* from the beginning of menstruation through menopause.
- Eat a healthy diet and aim for a healthy weight.
- Keep diabetes under control.
- Get a medical checkup before pregnancy and address specific health issues including weight control, control of diabetes and any medications taken.
- Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Stop drinking alcohol prior to pregnancy or as soon into pregnancy as possible.
- Do not take illegal drugs.
- Plan carefully. Use contraception if taking medications that increase the risk for birth defects.
- Know your family medical history and potential genetic risks.

The NBDPN is working with health-care professionals and public health agencies around the country to encourage prevention and awareness of birth defects among the more than 60 million women of childbearing age in the United States. In addition to its efforts in prevention, the NBDPN works to improve nationwide surveillance of birth defects and to advance research on possible causes. It also offers support to families who are dealing with the realities of a child born with one of these conditions. Further information about NBDPN can be found at www.NBDPN.org.

For more information about *Birth Defects Prevention Month*, contact Devaiah Muccatira, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.4963 or dmuccatira@nd.gov.

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PROCLAMATION
BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH
JANUARY 2013

WHEREAS, birth defects can occur in any family, regardless of the parents' age, gender, race, health history, economic status or education; and

WHEREAS, birth defects affect one in every 33 babies in the United States and are a leading cause of death; in North Dakota, about one in every six infant deaths are the result of birth defects; and

WHEREAS, the prevalence of diabetes in women of childbearing age has doubled in the last decade, affecting 1.3 million nationwide, and babies born to women with diabetes are at greater risk of having a birth defect; and

WHEREAS, two out of three women take prescription medications during pregnancy, many to treat chronic conditions that may impact pregnancy; and

WHEREAS, early identification of a child with a birth defect and early intervention services typically improve the child's quality of life and may even save his or her life; and

WHEREAS, women are encouraged to take preventive actions such as taking a multivitamin with folic acid during pregnancy to prevent serious defects, maintaining a healthy weight, having regular checkups, learning about family history and genetic risks, and managing maternal medical conditions while minimizing unnecessary medication exposure during pregnancy.

NOW, THEREFORE, as Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim January 2013, **BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH** in the state of North Dakota.

Jack Dalrymple
Governor